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ACTION WHA-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00	DS-00
	EAP-00	EUR-00	H-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	NSAE-00	OMB-00
	PA-00	FMPC-00	R-00	EPAE-00	ECA-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00
	DRL-00	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/000W		

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4574
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SIPDIS

FOR EUR/WE AND WHA/CCA

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TAGS: PREL PHUM CU FR

SUBJECT: GOF/NGOS AND CUBAN OUTREACH

REF: A. PARIS 4951

1B. STATE 152813

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Paul Mailhot for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The GOF shares USG goals of facilitating a transition towards democracy, supporting Cuban Civil society, and preparing for a post-dictatorship Cuba. The GOF, French public, and NGOs, however, are critical of the US embargo of Cuba. France's Cuba policy remains anchored in the EU common position. To be most effective, a USG initiative should be cast as an effort to initiate a dialogue with the EU -- in capitals and in Brussels -- on possible joint action. French NGOs, several currently engaged with Cuban civil society, are more likely to respond to overtures from US-based NGOs than from the USG. End Summary.

GOF

12. (U) The GOF holds to the common EU position on Cuba, adopted by the EU Council of Ministers in December 1996. In response to Cuba's arrest of 75 dissidents in March 2003 and reinstatement of the death penalty, France, along with the other members of the European Union, condemned the abuse of human rights and fundamental freedoms and instituted a number of sanctions in a June 5, 2003 declaration and reaffirmed its position in regards to Cuba and the previously imposed restrictions in its statement of June 14, 2004. In observing these restrictions, France has, among other things, invited a number of dissidents to the July 14, 2003 Bastille Day celebration in Havana. A May 2003 reevaluation and redistribution of its bilateral assistance to Cuba resulted in Havana unilaterally refusing French assistance and severing negotiations on new programs. Castro has also cut official contact between the GOC and the French Embassy in Havana. Most recently, France and other EU member states voted with the United States to condemn the human rights situation in Cuba in a close 22 to 21 vote April 15 at the 60th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights.

13. (U) The mayors of Strasbourg and Paris have both supported the twinning of libraries in France with independent libraries in Cuba through the Support Group for the Independent Libraries (Paris).

NGOs

14. (U) There are a number of French NGOs very active in promoting human rights and the peaceful transition toward democracy in Cuba. Reporters Sans Frontieres (Reporters Without Borders) has sharply criticized the regime in Havana, calling Castro a "predator of press freedom" and labeling Cuba as "the world's biggest prison for journalists." They have actively encouraged European parliamentarians to sign a "Brussels Declaration" in which they undertake to constantly petition the Cuban government for the release of the 75 dissidents arrested in March 2003 and to call on the "European Commission and Council to pursue policies consistent with this goal." Reporters Without Borders has also launched a campaign aimed at discouraging the approximately 800,000 European tourists who visit Cuba each year, employing the slogan, "Cuba Si, Castro No."

15. (U) The Free Cuba Solidarity Collective is made up of

representatives from several other NGOs operating out of France, including Action Droits de l'Homme, Free Cuba European Association, and the Third Cuban Republic Association. They organize a weekly protest in front of the Cuban Embassy in Paris and arranged a meeting in April between members of the French National Assembly and Cuban dissidents in Paris to thank the representatives for their solidarity in sponsoring 79 Cuban political prisoners.

Assessment

16. (C) Comment: There is support in France for the promotion of human rights and democratic development in a post-Castro Cuba, but there is also a widespread public view that the US embargo of Cuba makes life more difficult for the average Cuban without materially changing Castro-regime policy. This view is shared at the policy level in the GOF, and is also reflected in the EU common policy on Cuba, to which France will continue to adhere. To be most effective, a USG approach seeking to encourage greater activism in support of Cuban opposition groups and to exert greater pressure on the Castro regime to respect human rights should be cast as a

desire to dialogue with the EU -- in capitals and in Brussels -- to explore possible joint measures. There is also scope for discussion with key Parliamentarians about how to best support the cause of human rights and democratic transition in Cuba. Several active NGOs exist in France that currently coordinate efforts with some members of Cuban civil society. These NGOs share the public and official criticism of the US embargo of Cuba, and would therefore be more receptive to suggestions for joint efforts coming from US-based NGOs than from the USG. End Comment.

Leach

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